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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0724

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2419

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0835

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2827

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2212

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000187

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ NGO LEADERS: PRESSURE, BUT OPPORTUNITIES TOO

REF: A. BISHKEK 173

[¶](#)B. BISHKEK 131

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In a series of meetings over the past month, NGO and youth leaders described a civil society that is reeling from relentless government pressure and intimidation.

They agreed that the Bakiyev government has effectively consolidated political power through the falsified parliamentary elections and by control of the media. As a result, the political opposition was splintered, and the space for civil discourse had been reduced. Some worried that the government's tactics would create a more radical opposition and possibly lead to confrontation, especially if there were no other outlets available. Some expressed concern that donor assistance to the government was having a negative impact, but they supported the idea of increased U.S. assistance for "independent media." Nevertheless, most said that despite the difficult situation there were still opportunities to work for reform. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Over the past month, Ambassador and Emboffs held a series of roundtable discussions with leaders of Kyrgyz NGOs, human rights organizations, and youth groups. While some of the groups have an expressed political orientation -- for example, the Ya Ne Veru ("I Don't Believe") youth group was formed to protest the government's handling of the December parliamentary elections -- it is safe to say that all of the organizations Embassy met with are seen by the government as opposition -- or potential opposition.

Pressure and Intimidation

¶13. (C) In each of the meetings, the civil society leaders complained of government pressure against them and their organizations. Raya Kadyrova, head of Foundation for

Tolerance International, said the administration was using a range of threats, from physical intimidation to tax inspections, to harass the opposition, civil society, and anyone else who "thinks differently." She and Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society leader Dinara Oshurahunova cited instances of physical threats against their employees, particularly in the regions. Standing up against government attacks and defending cases in court, they said, was taking up all their time. In addition, colleagues had become wary of supporting each other, fearing they could become the next target of government pressure. Youth leaders said that they, as well as participants in their meetings, had been harassed, followed, and intimidated. One activist said that the government was ultimately trying to control civil society, similar to the situation in Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, through proposed legislation to provide government funding for NGOs.

Consolidating Power

¶4. (C) All of the civil society leaders complained of the president's consolidation of power under the new constitution. Aziza Abdirasulova, leader of the Kylym Shamy NGO, said the pro-presidential Ak Jol party had an "imperial mandate" in the parliament, making the parliament merely a "hand of the president." Oshurahunova and others pointed out that the Ak Jol "victory" in the elections had come at the price of exacerbating north-south tensions in the country; (fraudulently) excluding the Ata Meken party from the parliament left many in the north unrepresented. And the administration's control is not limited to parliament. Tolekan Ismailova, director of Citizens Against Corruption, said that the current situation resembled Soviet times, with the "vertical of power" extending to local governments. Many

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feared that this power would be used to "divide up the assets," rather than address the needs of the citizens.

A Disillusioned Opposition

¶5. (C) As a result of the relentless government pressure, the current political opposition is demoralized and directionless. The youth leaders noted that many "good leaders" had left the country. Long-time activists Asiya Sasykbayeva and Cholpon Jakupova predicted that the "old revolutionaries" of the opposition, such as ex-MPs Omurbek Tekebayev, Temir Sariyev, and Kubatbek Baibolov, would be replaced by a younger and more radical opposition. They pointed to ex-MP Azimbek Beknazarov's formation of a "revolutionary committee" (Ref A) as a case in point, although others dismissed Beknazarov for making "unrealistic demands" that Bakiyev resign. While some of the NGO leaders felt that protest was not likely under the current circumstances, others thought that the government's tactics could lead to a confrontation. The youth leaders thought that confrontation was possible if the government did not address the (economic) needs of its citizens.

Mixed Opinion about MCA Threshold Program

¶6. (C) Several of the NGO leaders expressed concern about "negative impacts" of donor assistance. For example, Kadyrova said she had initially supported the "reform program" for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but now she saw that the Ministry used technical assistance, such as computers and video cameras, to monitor and intimidate citizens. Kadyrova and some youth leaders expressed concern about the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) Threshold Program, fearing that the benefits that would accrue to the ministries would ultimately be used against civil society. Nazgul Turdubekova of the Youth Human Rights Group said that instead the MCC should fund training programs for the police

to work with the public in a rule-of-law society, rather than provide a direct subsidy to the budget. Ambassador provided background on the Threshold Program, explaining that the Threshold Program did not provide a direct subsidy to the state budget. (This appeared to address these concerns.) Sasykbayeva and Jakupova, on the other hand, supported the Threshold Program as a positive way to influence Kyrgyz reform in the judicial and law enforcement sectors.

Seeking Assistance for Media

¶7. (C) Nearly all of activists cited a lack of independent media -- particularly broadcast media -- as a major problem for the country, especially in the regions, where internet access is limited. Sasykbayeva and Jakupova asked for U.S. support for an independent, satellite-based television station; they said that satellite television would be the best outlet, as many homes, even in outlying areas, already had dish receivers.

Comment

¶8. (C) Across the board, the civil society leaders we met with felt pressured and intimidated by the government. They believed that the government's tactics had severely reduced the space for civil discourse, and they worried what could happen with no outlets available. Nevertheless, most said that despite the difficult situation there were still opportunities to work for reform. While they are dispirited, they haven't given up.

YOVANOVITCH